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THE VALE OF ARDEN AND OTHER POEMS

BY ALFRED HAYES

LONDON JOHN LANE
AT THE SIGN OF THE
BODLEY HEAD

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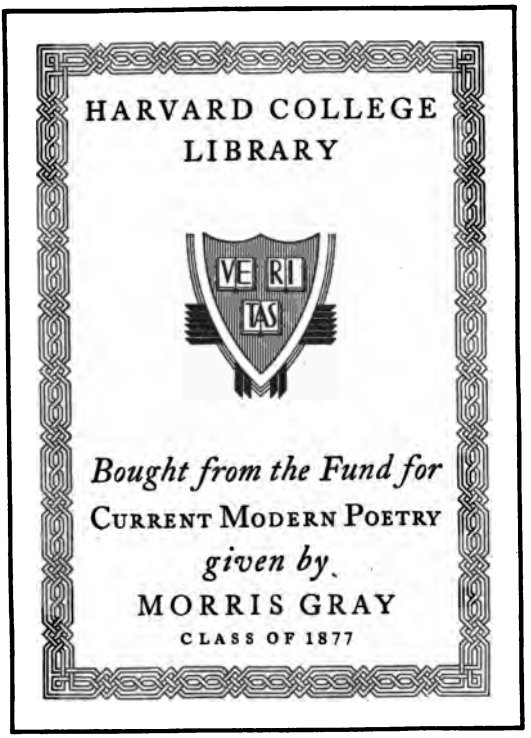

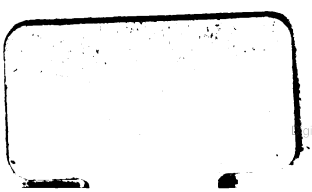

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To Thomas Beach Esq
from his grateful
and affectionate
pupil
Alfred Hayes.

February, 1895.

THE VALE OF ARDEN

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The twelve poems immediately following the Dedication originally appeared in a privately issued volume, entitled "A Fellowship in Song," written in collaboration with Mr Norman Gale and Mr Richard Le Gallienne. For permission to reprint two poems the Author's thanks are due to the Editors of "The Spectator" and "The Yellow Book."

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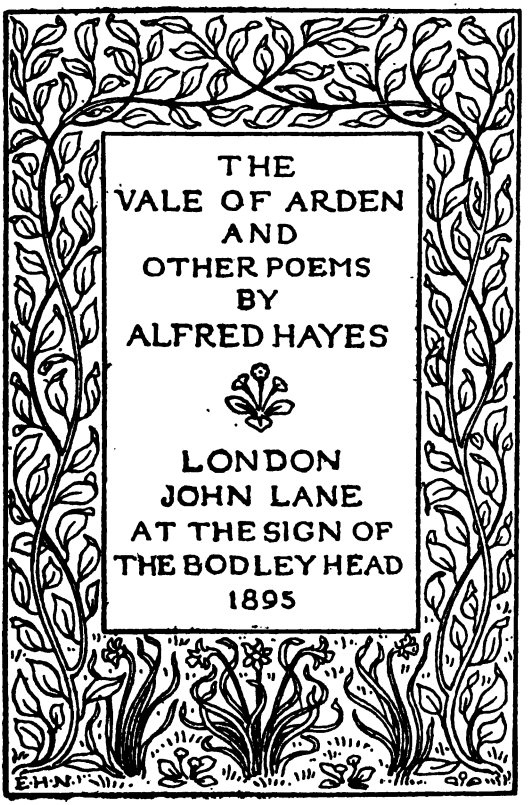

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Dedication

TO MY WIFE

Beloved wife,
For ever mine, not by the rash
Consuming kiss
Whose fierce flame turns to early ash,
But by the love that is
The sunshine of the tree of life;

Thy love, that lent
Its morning breath to song, hath hushed
My manlier lute;
As birds that pipe when dawn is flushed,
Or eve is wan, are mute
At noontide of their full content.

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When love had birth,
My heart became a secret shell
Where many an air
Moaned of the sea of love—Ah! well,
Those songs, my sweet, will share
Our slumber in the sacred earth;

And now that day
Is darkened by the hand of death,
In warning raised,
And the dread angel threateneth,
While love recoils amazed,
The hour wherein the soul grows gray;

Again my heart
Is shaken into song; for so
I need thy love
As blossoms need the light, and know
This paradise will prove
A wilderness if thou depart.

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Therefore I crave
With all my selfish strength that thou
May'st close mine eyes,
Not I, belovéd, thine; death's brow
Frowns not on him that dies,
But him that kneels beside the grave.

Nor could my loss
So harm thee, as thy loss would blight
My lonelier soul;—
But ah! thy tears!—'tis well that night
Obscures the shore, where roll
The waters each must singly cross.

Is love afraid
Of love's best friend? Is it to see
His picture wear
Its highest holiest light, that He
Who painted love so fair
Hath edged it with so deep a shade?

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Thy beauty glows
The brighter for this cloud, fair flower
Suffused with light
Of love's own sun, whose gracious power
Evil and good unite
To praise, as all men praise the rose.

Still would I woo
To win thee, though I have by rote
Thy sure consent;
For thou art mistress of each note
Of love's sweet instrument,
And art as free as thou art true.

I ask no life
Beyond this homely earth, so God
The boon bestow
Of autumn calm, and, ere the sod
Receive us, days of snow
For closer nestling, faithful wife.

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But whether long
Or brief our transient honeymoon,
We'll share at last
One dwelling, where in love's high noon
Our dearest days were passed,
Not far from Avon's slumber-song.

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TO NORMAN GALE

(With that portion of "A Fellowship in Song" entitled "From Midland Meadows.")

FRIEND, whom I met in fruitful days
Rambling amid sequestered ways
Of rustic song,
These flowers, in midland meadows grown
While yet I walked and mused alone,
Pleased to be laid beside thine own,
To thee belong.

We both have worshipped the pure rest
Of Arden's gently sloping breast,
With faith sincere;

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The simple breadth of view, that fills
Our famished souls, the voice that stills,
The comfort of the lowly hills,
To both are dear.

Oft have we blest each woodland throat,
Have held our breath for some rare note
In secret brake;
Together watched the moon sail through
Mysterious seas of hoary blue,
Or stars mid billowy clouds pursue
Her amber wake;

Then, flushed with winter's honest kiss,
Have heard the yule-log snap and hiss,
While songs, unsung
By souls that glowed apart before,
Leapt from our spirits' molten ore,
As from the fire's refulgent core
Tongue leapt to tongue.

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Age will abate the lyric flame,
The grave's dull tooth consume our name;
But hap what may,
Friend, we have captured fugitive
Fine joys, whose music will outlive
All the discordant world can give
Or take away.

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THE VALE OF ARDEN

Here, in this maze of stifling streets,
Where heaven's own eye looks sick and spent,
Where day to day care's curse repeats,
And nature's priceless poesy
Is bartered for a glittering discontent,
I would not choose to die.

But when with weary feet I turn,
Baffled, from truth's continual quest,
And hope's rich bow hath ceased to burn,
And, heard afar, the curfew-bell
Calleth my heart home to the quiet breast
Of her I love so well—

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Dear mother Earth—I fain would watch
The wisdom of thy gradual ways
From underneath some ancient thatch,
Where all that toucheth eye or ear
Keepeth the simple tone of those good days
When childhood's fount ran clear;

There to abide, and hold awhile
Communion with thy soul, and mark
Thy reverend visage frown and smile,
And woo the secret of the breeze,
While dawn grows noon and noon declines to dark
By unperceived degrees;

So, made at one with thee, to taste
Contentment's temperate cup, nor spill
One precious drop in needless haste,
But, with youth's fever-dream subdued,
Let Nature's sovereign alchemy distil
The balm of quietude;

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And feel her healing influence fall,
As when upon a sufferer's head
A hand is laid, medicinal
To put the lean and clamorous brood
Of pain-begotten cares to flight, and spread
A slumber through the blood.

Embosomed shall my cottage be
In woodlands, whence the village spire
Peeps, and the overflowing glee
Of lips that cannot long be sad
Makes with the songbirds' sweet untutored quire
Music divinely glad;

Not where the cloud-encumbered brows
Of mountains brood o'er barren dales,
And many a fretful torrent flows;
Nor where, with slow-returning sigh,
The sleepless surge eternally bewails
Life's lonely mystery;

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But where, by moss-grown watermills
And willowy meadows fringed with reed,
Old Avon creeps beside the hills
That shelter, not seclude, the plain,
And peaceful kine o'er sunny pastures feed
Refreshed with genial rain.

There, in the softly sloping lap
Of England's peace, where hedges trim
Chequer the lea, and mists enwrap
Each hidden hamlet, waits my home—
A drowsy region, friendly unto him
That asks no more to roam;

There Shakespeare's self was moulded; there
He wooed his love, he wove his verse;
There his full soul grew ripe; and ere
His song was stilled, on that kind breast
Contented well to sleep, he laid a curse
On who should break his rest.

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A land where venerable trees
Whisper to many a storied grange,
Where orchards slumber, and the breeze
Comes laden with the breath of flowers,
And all things bask, and nothing swift or strange
Disturbs the loitering hours.

No sea-blast warps the stateliness
Of those great elms; but wafted mild
From the warm hills the large airs bless
The mellow midland vale; and all
That liveth where its generous sun hath smiled
Doth goodly grow and tall.

Not desolate is he that dwells
In that still country; all around
Breathes a familiar voice, that tells
The soul's desire is satisfied,
And man with every earth-born thing is bound
In kindred close and wide.

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The murmur of the haunted woods,
The sombre music of the storm,
The spell that o'er the distance broods,
In one broad harmony unite
Of peace, as blend the rainbow's tones to form
The perfect chord of light;

And as of yore rich incense rose,
When on their knees the people fell
'Neath some vast dome, so all that grows
Beneath heaven's roof pays to the sun
Due worship of earth's sweet and wholesome smell,
Mingling all life in one;

The fragrance of the fresh-turned loam,
Of hawthorn bloom and breathing hay,
The slumbrous air of harvest-home,
Find each in man their counterpart,
And make the echoes of old memories play
About his listening heart;

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Whether through greenwood shades he steals,
Or museth where the landscape sweeps
Into the realm of dream, he feels
A sense of great companionship,
Of one that knoweth all but ever keeps
A finger on the lip;

He hears—when not a blade is stirred,
And, muffled in dense foliage,
Only the call of some shy bird
Deepens the silence of the whole—
He hears a voice whose comfort can assuage
The fever of his soul.

Gently the seasons twine their arms,
Lingering amid those tranquil glades,
Relieving each the other's charms,
Waking and lulling pure desires—
A restful loveliness that never fades,
A change that never tires.

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Spring trills her blithest carol there,
When cowslips fleck the glistening green,
When swallows cleave the gladsome air
With rapturous cries, and bursting buds
Breathe, after showers, a soft mysterious sheen
Along the sunlit woods.

There, when the hidden dove all day
Purrs in the coppice dim with heat,
Reclined beneath a wild-rose spray
June sleepeth in the still noontide,
While over fragrant fields of bean and wheat
The slow cloud-shadows glide.

But chiefly autumn loves to shed
Her placid sunshine o'er the vale,
When wide across the mead is spread
Warm river-mist, and the mild year
Dreameth, and orchards rich with fruit exhale
A lustrous atmosphere;

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Then sweet it is, with meek-eyed dawn,
While yet the shadows of the sheaves
Stretch far and faint, to pace the lawn
Dew-silvered; or to stray with her
By ragged hedgerows while the reddening leaves
Are gray with gossamer;

To watch, when golden afternoon
Floodeth the garden's sanctuary,
Bees harvesting the blossom's boon,
Where mid the stately hollyhocks
Teems the rich hive, and flits the butterfly
O'er flower-beds edged with box.

When winter's loud-lunged herald wears
His motley suit, 'tis good to mark
Storm-pennons, which the south wind tears
To tatters, stream across the sky,
And sun-gleams chequer hamlet, holt and park
With wild emblazonry,

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Chasing the shadows as they sweep
O'er stubble fields and withered sedge,
Gilding awhile the ricks that peep,
Fresh-thatched, where brooding yews protect
Some low-browed homestead on the river's edge,
Time-stained and ivy-decked.

Dear too are winter's sober skies
To him who pants for quiet; all
The lavish autumn splendour lies
Asleep beneath its coverlet
Of fallen foliage; and a purple pall
Clings, when the sun hath set,

To naked woods as soft as clouds;
While with cold arm the saintly moon
Hallows the silent mist that shrouds
The darkening furrows, and a calm
Unfelt in springtime's morn or summer's noon
Sinks on the soul, like balm

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On a parched wound. And as the glow
Of sunlight's pride must perish ere
The stars can tremble, even so
Is many a modest beauty bid
To grace the staid night-season of the year,
Whom his bright day had hid;

No longer overgrown with green,
But gemmed with rain and berry-crowned,
From each bare hedge the eye may glean
Soul-sustenance;—enough to trace
One spray of white-veined ivy clinging round
An oak-tree's lichened base;

Or roaming the chill fields among,
Where heavily the plough-team moves,
To hear the robin's slender song,
When fuller throats have ceased to strain,
Repeat to flowerless glades and mournful groves
Its simple sweet refrain;

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And nearing home, through leafless trees
To see the thin blue smoke ascend,
Where amid vine-clad cottages
Life slowly smoulders to its rest,
Each kindly-hearted swain a natural friend,
Each roof a human nest.

So would I praise the bounteous year,
And quickened by earth's close caress,
Would hold the lowliest weed more dear
Than all the laboured pomp of art;
Eased of the city's crowded loneliness
Which chokes, yet starves, the heart;

But strengthened from the living wells,
And nurtured on the wholesome fare
Of country sights and sounds and smells,
Would find beneath the greenwood bough
All that I loved in childhood unaware,
And love with worship now.

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And let me at the last repose
Not where along unlovely ways
The roaring tide of trouble flows,
But where is heard the bleat of sheep,
And homely elms, that breathe of by-gone days,
Watch o'er the churchyard's sleep;

There by the sweet birds shall be said
My requiem, and death's garden wear
A look so kind, that unafraid
Children shall come to weave a wreath
Of daisies gathered from my grave, nor care
Who lieth underneath.

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NOVEMBER

Mourner, who wanderest gray and mute
O'er mouldering leaves and fallen fruit,
Weep, unreproved!
Thou art not for thy sombre suit
The less beloved.

Welcome as April's bridal tears,
Or the ripe smile September wears,
Are thy grave eyes,
Made wistful with the agéd year's
Dim memories.

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Thine are the dawns of solemn sheen,
Through interwoven branches seen,
As when doth smite
Through some cathedral's carven screen
The altar's light.

Thou lendest darkness to the yew,
To distant hills a deeper blue;
Thy footsteps wake
Mosses to flower, when flowers are few
In leafless brake.

Fair as her liveliest summer dress
The beech's silver nakedness,
When red and gold,
That robed her for the storm's caress,
Her feet enfold.

Through steel-blue clouds a gleaming wedge
Strikes on the berry-jewelled hedge
And dusky wood,
On osiers smooth and tawny sedge
And streams in flood.

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And as a child's light laugh beguiles
Sorrow to lose herself in smiles,
The redbreast's lay
Maketh the woodland's silent aisles
Seem almost gay.

'Tis good to watch the loose clouds driven,
When the broad south their web hath riven,
Or pace again
Beneath a calm snow-burdened heaven
The darkening lane,

Strewn with the maple's moth-like seeds,
And catch the scent of smouldering weeds
O'er brown waves borne
Of fresh-ploughed loam and silent meads
And cornfields shorn;

'Tis good to feel thy teardrops fall
Upon the dead fern's quiet pall
Of purple mist,
When frost for their snow-burial
The wolds hath kissed;

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But best to watch—when death-like eve
The pensive landscape doth bereave
Of short-lived day—
Thy great pathetic sunsets grieve
Their hearts away.

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CONSERVATION

Thou, who from many a spray forlorn
Its ruddy jewellery hast torn,
Belovéd thrush!
From mountain-ash no need to fly,
At sight of me, to sanctuary
Of laurel-bush.

Plunder thy fill!—my garden yet
Is sweet with stock and mignonette,
With asters gay,
And of its plenty well can spare,
O prince of song, the frugal fare
It doth purvey.

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Soon will the dahlia's pride lie dead,
The sunflower droop his kingly head,
And pinched with cold
The lordly hollyhock repine
For still September's mild sunshine
And moon of gold.

Then winter with her wailful rains
Will weep o'er autumn's gaunt remains,
Or watch them lie
Stark in the snow's sepulchral dress,
Entombed within a featureless
Gray vault of sky.

But when I sigh, dear mottled thief,
For crocus-flower and lilac-leaf
Delaying long,
The vanished splendour of the tree
Will glow again, conserved by thee,
In glorious song.

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ILLUSION

(Composed on observing that the rainbow, when steadily gazed at, disappears.)

When in despite of care's dead weight,
And tarnished faith, and hope's decay,
A gladness stirs thee, delicate
As the first tremor of the spring
Or thrill of love's awakening,
Ask it not Whence—or it will shrink away.

So when the rainbow's transient smile
Cheereth heaven's gray and tearful face,
Look lightly on that tender wile;
For if too hard, in joy's excess,
Thou gaze, the specious loveliness
Will fade as doth a dream, and leave no trace.

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HAYESWATER

Enfolded in the mountain's naked arms,
Where noonday wears a drearier look than night,
And echo, like a shrinking anchorite,
Wanders unseen, and shadowy strange alarms
Visit the soul; there sunshine rarely warms
The crags, but only random shafts of light
Flit, while the black squalls shrilling from the height
Shudder along the lake in scattering swarms.
Cradle of tempests, whence the whirlwind leaps
To scourge the billows, till they writhe and rear
Columns of hissing spray; the wrinkled steeps
Scowl at the sullen moaning of the mere;
And luminous against the dale-side drear,
Ghostlike, the rainstorm's scanty vesture sweeps.

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HER FAITH

How quietly the cold hands keep,
Pressed to the gracious heart that loved their grace,
Poppies, unconscious of their resting-place,
Emblems of dreamless sleep.

Around her the star-systems roll
Through wastes of silence. Yet the enfolding Power,
That fashioned with such care a senseless flower,
Will not forsake a soul.

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LIGHT AND LOVE

Front not the sun; or dazzled by his whiteness
Earth's face will seem expressionless and dim,
Features confused and beauty drowned in brightness;
But turn from him,
And thou wilt find familiar scenes and homely
Transfigured with a tender atmosphere;
Scan not the source of all that makes earth comely;
Enough that light is here.

Question not love; or pondering love's essence
The wonder of his glory will confound
Those fair effects that issue from his presence;
But look around,
And thou wilt find the narrowest prospect spacious,
And dark perplexities serenely clear;
Scan not the source of all that makes life gracious;
Enough that love is here.

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OUR SHAKESPEARE

To-NIGHT, where'er men boast thy native tongue,
They crown thy brows anew with solemn bays,
The cup in silence to thy memory raise,
Imperial master of the feast of song—
In seemly silence—for what voice so strong,
So sweet, as duly to declare thy praise?
But we, who dwell where Arden yet arrays
The oaks thou knew'st in green, where glides along
Gray Avon's peace, by many a gentle bend,
Through homely pastures, and the bees still sip
The flowers that heard thy footsteps—we may blend
Our homage with a sense of fellowship,
May mark a kindlier smile illume thy lip,
And feel thee less our sovereign than our friend.

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PRO TEMPORE

Sick of the tumult, weary of the wail,
That grateth where the city's breath is sour
With greed's unclean disease, where children cower
In noisome dens, and women gaunt and pale
Pollute their souls for bread, our hearts would fail
But for the faith that in some wiser hour
Men will possess in peace the world's rich bower;
Envy depart and righteousness prevail.
And yet, though other eyes than ours will see
The far fulfilment of our larger hope,
Justice ordains and pity pleads that we
Should cull one garland from the sunny slope
Where ease reclines, to gladden those who grope
In shades of want and sloughs of misery.

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THE SILENT HARP

Poor harp, how desolate!—The loving hand,
That wind-like wandered o'er thy tremulous strings,
Culling sweet sheaves of sound or whisperings
Æolian, at the Master's mute command
Drops lifeless. In that unresponsive land
What music He from earthly sufferings
Evoketh and the stress of mortal things,
Wistful we seek but may not understand.
Yonder may dwell continual peace, but here
All peace begetteth and is born of strife,
And every smile is sister to a tear;
Death only can the missing note supply
That shall resolve the discord of this life;
Silence alone is perfect harmony.

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THE IDEAL

Sorrow for him who evermore hath striven
To shape the perfect vision of his soul;
For gazing up into the face of heaven
The falling snow seems foul.

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MERRY AUTUMN

Golden woodland, sea-blue sky,
Crests of cloud-waves tossed on high;

Bouncing breezes, lustrous showers,
Leaves and berries gay as flowers;

Purple storms in rainbow belt,
Morning frosts that flash and melt;

Dawns arrayed in gorgeous light,
Dazzled earth in motley dight.

Robins flute a cheerful tune,
Orchards glow with apples strewn;

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Sunbeams bless the gathered sheaves,
Children chase the skipping leaves;

Buds grow plump in glossy sheath;—
Who dare call this rapture death?

Autumn 's neither sick nor sad;
Spring 's begotten; God is glad.

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THE SEA

Eldest of singers, never-silent sea,
Whether in robe of gray or changeful green
Thou chantest, or in mail of moonlight sheen,
No ear hath learnt thine open mystery.
Companion of the world's wide grief, by thee
We enter—gazing on thy tranquil mien,
Or hearkening to the tempest's hollow threne—
The echoing portals of eternity.
Whether on solemn shores advancing quires
Of surpliced waves raise the resounding psalm,
Or prostrate murmur prayer, thy voice avails
The pulse of man's disquietude to calm;
Mourner, whose long complaining never tires,
Soother, whose consolation never fails.

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IN THE HOUSE OF DEATH

I.

With tears they bring her babe to smile
The last farewell; by childhood's grace,
In death's dark presence-hall awhile
There shines a cloudless face.

Too young to know the awful bar
That keeps him from those lips so white,
He wafts a baby kiss—sweet star
Unconscious of the night—

And stretches dimpled hands to grasp
The lilies on her breast, nor knows
How cold the hands their stems that clasp,
How deep the breast's repose.

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Poor helpless author of our dole,
Who ne'er shall lisp a mother's name,
God keep him, till he meet her soul
From whom he dearly came.

II.

Beside her fretful infant's cot
The father bows his stricken head;
One lieth near, whose sleep will not
Be more disquieted.

The daylight faileth; colourless
Are all things in the darkening room;
Such nightfall doth his soul possess,
Such dumb and hueless gloom.

With trembling hands the child he takes;
He moans a verse the happy wife
Would croon; then heaves a sob that shakes
The very roots of life.

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O little arms around him curled,
Cling closer to what love is left;
Thou dost not know of what a world
Of love thou art bereft.

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THE DAWN OF SPRING

In the dead of winter's gloom,
When Earth in her shroud lay stark,
She dreamt that one day the lark
Would pierce with his sunny song
Her snow-built tomb,
And wake into bloom
The blossom that slept too long.

He is up!—and heaven's deep blue
Grew deeper for that last strain
Ere he dived to the warm-bosomed plain;
And with what glad bound his voice
Pealed forth anew,
When again he flew
To the realms where the clouds rejoice!

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He sang, as he stooped to his mate,
Of the glory of sun and sky;
But now the wild poesy,
That welcomes the first rainbow
And storms heaven's gate,
Is of joys that wait
On the breathing earth below.

The passionate hopes that swell
The great soul in his little breast
Not even his song hath expressed;
Nor the Muse, who has dipped a wing
In the living well
Of truth, can tell
The rapture of the spring;

It leaps in the gladsome air,
Like wine that hath long lain still
In the womb of earth, until

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At a sunbeam's kiss it breaks
Into frolic fair,
And fragrance rare
From its dancing heart awakes ;

For April hath moved grim March
To smiles, and to tears the snow
That lurked by the black hedgerow ;
The brooks prattle loud of the showers ;
And to breezes, that parch
No more, the larch
Hath opened her crimson flowers.

Through the wayside herbage sere
A new-born green upheaves ;
The hornbeam's shrivelled leaves
Shudder for shame of their age ;
For spring wastes no tear
On the buried year,
But enjoyeth his heritage.

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The coltsfoot, that never cringed
To the tyrannous east, doth make
Gay mock of his flight; the brake
With the haze from its young buds shed
Is dimly tinged,
And the alder hath fringed
Its branches with tassels red.

Now gleam in the sun and dance
The gnats, frail brood of the calm;
The bee, on the bee-like palm,
With his sultry summer sound
And slow dalliance
Doth disentrance
The butterfly underground.

The shining team doth crawl
Over the upland bare;
Billows of loam, as the share

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Upturneth the good brown land,
Glistening fall,
To be crumbled small
For the seed by the wind's broad hand.

The south her white-winged fleet
To the dappled hills hath driven;
The great warm heart of heaven,
Where love doth dwell, once more
Is seen to beat,
And its genial heat
Hath opened earth's every pore.

In the depths of the budding grove
Sweet fountains of feeling start;
They well in the old man's heart
As he lifteth his cottage latch,
Where the courtly dove
Makes murmuring love
To his lady on lichened thatch.

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The rush of life, which thrills
The trees into tender sheen,
The sallow grass into green,
Is welcome as when the breath
Of daffodils
Fresh hope instils
In one who is watched by death.

O bliss! once more to feel
The native smell of earth,
Where the wheat has lowly birth
Or the violet's lip is curled,
Through the sick soul steal,
With power to heal
Like the hope of a better world;

To feel the soft caress
Of a breeze, foretelling May,
O'er the burdened bosom play

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And fondle the troubled brow,
While the sun doth dress
In new loveliness
Each smooth sap-swollen bough!

His first hot kiss doth inspire
Earth's breast with a passion of joy;
No more is she hard or coy;
Her blood, benumbed so long,
Is all afire
With spring's desire,
And flames into flower and song.

Rejoice!—for care away
With the black east-wind has flown;
Young mirth has mounted his throne;
And love, no more heartsick
At spring's delay,
Resumes her sway;
And the dead has become the quick.

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ON THE MOUNTAIN

I SCALE the fortress where the winds keep ward
O'er health's unrifled hoard;
Each footstep is an ecstasy; my blood
Leaps with the sparkling flood
Of sunshine from God's crystal chalice poured.
Ascending I behold
Earth's ancient scroll unfold;
The mountain's naked shoulder screens from view
The valley of last night's expectant rest,
Whose hamlet, as the prospect grew,
Shrank to a wood-wren's nest.
Panting with joyful toil at last I stand
Where taintless breezes range,
An infant holding Nature by the hand,
A new-born creature, to myself most strange;

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Exalted to this sovereign height
I taste awhile an eagle's lone delight;
Then, as I scan
The Maker's outspread plan,
My humbled spirit kneels
And uncomplaining feels
The insignificance of man.
Around me slumber giant limbs; below
The vapours crawl that curtain me from care;
A stream unseen is heard to flow;
The breast of peace lies bare;
Reposing there,
I gaze along the avenues of air
To that which seems a sea beyond the sea,
The dim horizon of eternity.

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FELLOW-CAPTIVES

How blest on earth's green lap to lie,
Escaped from town's captivity,
But that its smoke on evening gale
Far borne—this Eden's serpent-trail—
Sullies the placid sky;

Which else were stainless as the hue
Of those moss-cradled eggs, whose view
In quaint-cut hedge of town parterre
Drove me to seek the taintless air
And unpolluted blue.

Not here, alas!—Full three leagues fled
From yon grim city, overhead
Hangs gloom, and silence doth appal
As in some stricken house where all
The little ones lie dead.

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What evil spell has power to hush
The rapture of the impassioned thrush?
What keeps his sable-suited peer
Dumb, and each dainty sonneteer
Of copse and lisping rush,

That follows summer o'er the foam?
Or why is heaven's eternal dome
Vacant of its high chorister?—
Nature, her music reft from her,
Is drearier than the home

Whose sadness slowly I regain
Through ever-deepening shades of pain,
As ever more the air grows sick
Where the dull miles of dismal brick
Spread like a loathsome blain;

My prison, and—God help you!—yours,
Poor little poets. Man endures
The woe his own unwisdom yields,
Who lost the freedom of the fields,
Misled by his own lures;

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But you, whose ditty's simple meed
Was still to pluck the thistle seed,
You, bolder finch of sanguine breast,
And you, small sir, with rosy crest—
Cursed be the ruffian's greed

That mocked thy love-call, limed the spray
Where thou didst light to pipe thy lay,
Tore thee from all thou heldest dear,
To join thy captive song-mates here—
A pitiful array

Of joy's own angels doomed to dwell
Pent in the city's weary hell;
For whisperings of the wind-swept wheat,
The clangour of the jostling street;
For clover-breath, the smell

Of factory-fumes; for heaven's great ring,
Scarce space to prune an aching wing!
No more, ensconced in hawthorn flower,
To weave the wonder of their bower,
Or feel the fluttering

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Of those faint pulses soon to burst
Each fragile casket!—but accurst
With man's regard, exiled from nest,
Woodland and sky and all God's best,
To languish mid man's worst.

Is't not enough that lean and pale
His children pine, but he must hale
The happiest of created things,
Made free by God's great gift of wings,
To share his crowded jail?

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A STORM SONG

Chasten the land, O wind;
Hurl autumn from his throne;
Be pitiless, be blind,
And let the forest groan;
The forest's quickened life
Will bless thee yet; for thou
Art God's keen pruning-knife
That lops each withered bough.

Chasten the land, O war;
Consume the false and frail
With fire of thy red star,
And let the nation wail;
Redeemed by sore distress
From rottenness of soul,
'Twill live some day to bless
The storm that made it whole.

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THE TRYST

The stars are faint and few,
The zenith yet is blue;

By daylight still is seen
The orchard's tender green,

Whose snowy bloom doth rest
As clouds on heaven's breast;

But clear and full and high
The moon enchants the sky.

When day and moonlight meet
My heart doth strangely beat;

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For when their lips have kissed,
I keep my silent tryst

With One, to whom alone
My inmost heart is known.

Her footsteps then are heard
When sleeping leaves are stirred;

Her eyes more tender are
Than twilight's only star;

She breathes as when the plane
Is fragrant after rain;

Her voice is that deep speech
Which music yearns to reach.

To her pure lips I clung
When boyhood's leaf was young;

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Her soul possessed the maid
When love was first afraid;

But now that love is bold,
The gray consumes the gold.

Sweet is the sultry noon
Of lusty full-blown June,

And sweet the golden fruit
Of love's accomplished suit;

But sweeter twilight's hour
And love's unfolding flower.

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TO THE COWSLIP

Of all spring joys, the dearest is
To drink thy breath again,
Freshest of flowers;
The bluebell lights the copse,
The primrose paves the glen,
But thy frank beauty overtops
In open fields
The new-born grass, to meet the kiss
Of sun and wind and showers,
And yields
Spring's essence from those five red drops
That dyed the breast of Imogen.

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Sun-freckled art thou, as the child
Who kneeleth down to snap
Thy sturdy stem,
And fill with thy pure gold
Her snowy-aproned lap,
White treasury of wealth untold;
Deftly she makes,
In bountiful profusion piled,
A regal ball of them,
And takes
For sceptre one that high doth hold
His head in pride of April sap.

My earliest love of flowers, how good
To lay my sunburnt face
In grass so lush
It shames the name of green,
And fold in one embrace
The clustered heads of all I glean,

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And kiss the pure
Warm lips of that fair sisterhood,
Or 'mid their golden flush
Immure
The splendour of some cowslip queen
Who reigned apart in loftier grace.

Then home to sleep by Avon stream,
Cheered by the honest wine
Of cowslip flowers;
So pure a draught alone
Gives slumber so divine;
All night I breathe the sweet air blown
O'er fields thick starred
With cowslip constellations, dream
Of gold-embrasured towers
That guard
Some fay for whom the bees make moan,
While cowslips by my cheek recline.

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A NOVEMBER PARABLE

Ah! piteous sight!
While yet the weird moonlight
Wove o'er the land her numbing spell,
Not a leaf fell
To break the crystal silence of the night.

But since the frost-subduing sun
His azure seigniory
From the horizon-mist hath won,
Whence his white troops in massive splendour loom,
The stricken leaves unceasingly
Down flutter to their tomb.

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So one who long hath borne
Grief's bitter cold,
Till faith has failed and hope herself grown old,
Endureth till the last chill hour is fled,
But at the flash of joy's forgotten morn
Drops dead.

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RUSSIA

(December, 1891)

As one, who finds the foe he sought to slay
Prostrate within the shadow of the tomb,
Forgets his wrath, so, grieving for thy doom,
Huge wrestler with starvation, we would lay
Our ancient grudge aside. The heavens are gray
With pitiless calm, and walls of winter loom
Around thy blighted plains; while he, to whom
Thou liftest ignorant hands, sits far away,
Unenvied prisoner to a fatal throne,
Spellbound, with nerveless arm and eye askance.
So vast thy misery, one hope alone
Rests—that, all else too weak, it may betide
Hunger's grim hand by dreadful paths will guide
Thy laggard feet to thy deliverance.

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REQUIESCAT

(October 6th, 1892)

Peace!—for no feebler voice avails to sing
The loss of him who best hath sung of loss.
Nature herself with folded wing
Stood mute; the great night held its breath;
Solemn the moonlight watched across
The mournful calm of summer's grave,
When reverently the hand of death
Earth's transitory chaplet took, and gave
An everlasting wreath.

Peace!—let no sacrilegious strain
Discordantly profane

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The sanctuary of silence where he lies,
Heedless of human worship, with the glow
Of God's white lamp upon the closéd eyes
And cold imperial brow.
Nor let a hasty hand presume
To lift the hallowed laurel from his tomb.

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POESY

He hears the music of his heart,
But knows not whence the breath is blown;
It comes from regions far apart,
With power beyond his own.

A presence at his side alights,
A whisper at his ear is heard;
Amazed he takes the pen, and writes
The inevitable word.

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TO THE REDBREAST

Sweet minstrel of the homes of men,
Waylayer of my early walk,
Stay till this dahlia stalk
Is tied, and then
We'll talk.

There, pretty gossip!—now, come near,
With jaunty tail, and head awry;
Thou least, of things that fly,
Hast need to fear
Man's eye.

A gracious legend guardeth thee,
My robin, with a hallowed name;
And trustfulness so tame
Puts cruelty
To shame.

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No prison waits for thee, dear; who,
Of all the joy-deserted throng
Who buy a captive song,
Would dare to do
Thee wrong?

Yes, I remember well the nest,
Six little bosoms brown-bespecked—
O tender architect—
And then each breast
Fire-flecked.

Yes; summer's gone; but what of that?
Now that her timid devotees
Are fled across the seas,
We two can chat
At ease.

We love to hear the bold wind blow,
To see his random might deflower
The rocking elms, that shower
Their golden snow
Where cower

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The sheep behind a shivering hedge;
We love the huddling clouds that rove
O'er the blue plain above
The horizon's edge;
We love

The tones, by moisture richly dyed,
Of winter's warm-hued nakedness,
When south winds blow, not less
Than autumn's pride
Of dress.

Then every voice but thine doth cease,
While He, Who teacheth all to sing,
Is darkly pondering
His masterpiece,
The spring.

As faintly through the gloom and damp
That fills some melancholy shrine,
When evening's brows decline,
A single lamp
Doth shine;

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So, when the mournful sunbeams slant
Where summer lieth sepulchred,
A throb of hope, bright bird,
In thy spare chant
Is heard.

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ESTRANGEMENT

No comfort in the world remains
  When love is fled;
'Tis but a coffin that contains
  The dead, the dead.

The unregarding wind sweeps by,
  Blank stares the heaven;
Indifferent along the sky
  The mist is driven.

Nursing their sorrow to and fro
  The sad boughs toss;
Winter bewaileth her own woe,
  And not our loss.

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O Nature, who dost give relief
To joy's full heart,
Thou, when the soul is spent with grief,
An alien art.

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THE LARK IN AUTUMN

The day's long splendour dies
A lingering death.—How still
The sea of country lies
Around this island hill.

The nestling sunbeams creep
Beneath the boughs; the gold
Fades into gray, and sleep
Descends on vale and wold.

God gave His wine all day,
Eve brings His healing balm;
Care perished far away
In yonder purple calm.

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Joy's river, that hath run
So swiftly, now doth flow
Toward the setting sun
With gathered fulness slow.—

But what bright spirit there
Leaps into music?—Hark!
The poet of the air,
The sky's own soul,—the lark!

His song the dayspring seems,
His pinions, as they soar,
Are lustrous with the beams
That light the land no more.

So often, at life's close,
A thrill of youth's delight
Invades its gray repose,
And greets the dawn of night.

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MY STUDY

Let others strive for wealth or praise
Who care to win;
I count myself full blest, if He,
Who made my study fair to see,
Grant me but length of quiet days
To muse therein.

Its walls, with peach and cherry clad,
From yonder wold
Unbosomed, seem as if thereon
September sunbeams ever shone;
They make the air look warm and glad
When winds are cold.

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Around its door a clematis
Her arms doth tie;
Through leafy lattices I view
Its endless corridors of blue
Curtained with clouds; its ceiling is
The marbled sky.

A verdant carpet smoothly laid
Doth oft invite
My silent steps; thereon the sun
With silver thread of dew hath spun
Devices rare—the warp of shade,
The weft of light.

Here dwell my chosen books, whose leaves
With healing breath
The ache of discontent assuage,
And speak from each illumined page
The patience that my soul reprieves
From inward death;

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Some perish with a season's wind,
And some endure;
One robes itself in snow, and one
In raiment of the rising sun
Bordered with gold;—in all I find
God's signature.

As on my grassy couch I lie,
From hedge and tree
Musicians pipe; or if the heat
Subdue the birds, one crooneth sweet
Whose labour is a lullaby,—
The slumbrous bee.

The sun my work doth overlook
With searching light;
The serious moon, the flickering star,
My midnight lamp and candle are;
A soul unhardened is the book
Wherein I write.

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There labouring, my heart is eased
Of every care;
Yet often wonderstruck I stand,
With earnest gaze but idle hand,
Abashed—for God Himself is pleased
To labour there.

Ashamed my faultful task to spell,
I watch how grows
The Master's perfect colour-scheme
Of sunset, or His simpler dream
Of moonlight, or that miracle
We name a rose.

There, in the lap of pure content,
I still would keep
The sabbath of a soul at rest;
Nor could I wish a close more blest
Than there, when life's bright day is spent,
To fall asleep.

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TO THE NEGLECTED MUSE

High priestess of the temple where my soul
Would daily kneel!
When happier singers make appeal
For grace, and I
Neglect thy service, chide not, but condole
With thy poor votary.

Forget thee?—ah! this morning, when soft flights
Of sea-born cloud
Sailed o'er the unregarding crowd
In that dense mart
Where I am bound, remembrance of thy rites
Was torment to my heart;

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And now returning through the city's roar,
With toil oppress,
And marking how the liquid west
From cloud is free,
Save one smooth bank that seems the printless shore
Of some untraversed sea,

I groan to think how twilight slowly fills
The spacious vale
Where I would watch with thee, how pale
Thy star-lamp shines,
While sunset dies beyond the solemn hills
And nightfall stirs the pines.

Still would I seek thee by the stream which flows
Through that sweet shire,
Where he who lightliest touched the lyre
Is laid asleep,
Till with its sister flood it found repose
In slumber of the deep.

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There would I follow thee, would shut my ears
To pleasure's call;
But duty holdeth me in thrall,
My days rush by,
And rarely through the driving rack appears
A space of quiet sky.

How should I sing when all my heart is kept
In bondage, vexed
With strife, and all my brain perplexed
With many a thread
Of tangled thought; I have no song; accept,
O Muse, my sighs instead.

Forget thee?—if my fingers could unclasp
The lyre, and seize
Life's cup, and drain it to the lees,
Then might I set
My heart no more on joy beyond my grasp,
Ah! then I might forget.

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Once I had thought in that fair company
To find a place,
Who daily tend before thy face
The sacred fire;
But love and care with one another vie
To thrust me from the quire.

Yet sometimes 'mid the city's glare and grime,
Far from thy sight,
I stand thy silent acolyte;
Enough for me;
I ask not thy regard, but only time,
Dear saint, to worship thee.

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